

Samuel Crowell: In Memoriam!

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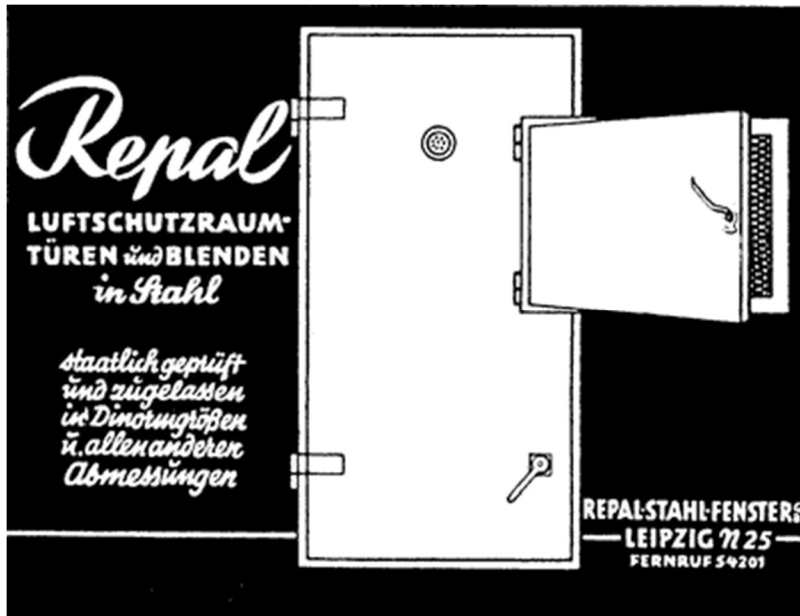
I learned of the passing of Samuel Crowell as I have learned of the passing of several friends over the past year—via email. I had been away for the day but decided to check my messages prior to retiring for the evening. There were several stacked up regarding my late friend; the subject of the first was simply “Crowell.” Nearly three weeks had already passed since the heart attack that claimed his life on 1 April—news doesn’t necessarily travel fast on the Internet.

As revisionists, we are naturally skeptical and therefore question reports of contemporary events as well as historical accounts. The attachment of an obituary quickly removed all doubt. It is widely known that “Samuel Crowell” was a pseudonym—one of several which my colleague chose to assign to his articles; I shall for the sake of the privacy of his family use that name throughout this article. Crowell selected his *nom de plume* due to the threat of persecution that revisionists suffered from the mid-1990s on. It was in fact legislation throughout Europe trampling free speech with regard to the Holocaust story that first caught Crowell’s eye and resulted in his immersion in the subject.

The man who would become Samuel Crowell was born in San Francisco on 5 May 1955. Crowell loved his country and especially the freedoms that so many took for granted during the Eisenhower administration of his birth. He would join the Marine Corps where he served two tours of duty. He graduated from the University of California (Berkeley) where he studied philosophy, foreign languages, and modern European history. His continued love of history and amazing ability to recall facts resulted in his attainment of a Master’s degree in Eastern European History from Columbia University. He would later become a Professor of History at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania.

I first became aware of Crowell around 1994. I spotted his comments on the alt-revisionism newsgroup in the days before the appearance of any websites on the Holocaust (or just about any other matter). His user ID at the time was “Ehrlich606” and for the first couple years, I referred to him simply as Ehrlich. I noticed his comments initially because they were utterly free of cant. His questions were sharp. His comments were direct—but never derogatory. Crowell would later describe himself as a “moderate revisionist.” This was more than a label but rather a school of thought that he hoped would find more adherents. Crowell was genuinely interested in debunking the exaggerations and excesses of the Holocaust story but did so without any intention of offending anyone—especially the Jewish people.

Shortly after our first exchanges on the Internet, I introduced Crowell to Bradley R. Smith and the small cadre of volunteers around CODOH. Crowell was immediately drawn to Smith’s style, charm, and cause—namely to argue for intellectual freedom with regard to the Holocaust story. It was not long after this that I had the opportunity to meet Crowell face-to-face. It was the first of many such occasions in which we would gather with other revisionists for food, drink, and discussion of the latest turns in Holocaust studies. During that first meeting, we visited the home of Friedrich Berg, who was well known for his studies surrounding the absurdity of the diesel-gas-chamber story.



The Repal company of Leipzig offers "air defense shelter doors and shutters, in steel" in this advertisement, which appeared in a 1942 issue of the German trade periodical "Baulicher Luftschutz." Such doors were gas resistant. Note the protected peep hole.

Berg shared documents from his personal files including several having to do with the construction and sale of German air-raid-shelter components. While going through these wartime materials, we first saw the Repal advertisement for "air defense shelter doors and shutters, in steel." We immediately recognized that the gas-resistant door with protected peephole was identical to the Majdanek "gas-chamber door" replica that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) had put on display for an American audience at their new museum on the National Mall.

By early 1997, Crowell's first article appeared on the CODOH Website, "Wartime Germany's Anti-Gas Air-Raid Shelters: A Refutation of Pressac's 'Criminal Traces.'" Crowell's approach was to address the leading "exterminationist" writers with a positive rather than negative approach. His idea was, rather than saying something could not have been used as a gas chamber, to explain what it may more likely have been used for. Beginning with Jean-Claude Pressac's noted 39 "Criminal Traces" – what he called "indirect proofs" of the Holocaust, Crowell presented benign explanations. When his article appeared in *The Journal of Historical Review*, the editor explained:[\[1\]](#)

"His basic argument is that the documents cited by Pressac as 'traces' of homicidal 'gas chambers' are references to air-raid shelters, or to their fittings or equipment. Specifically, he contends, the Birkenau crematory morgue rooms – the supposed 'gas chambers' where, it is alleged, hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed with 'Zyklon' pesticide – were modified to also serve as air-raid shelters with features to protect against possible Allied attacks with poison gas."

By July of 1997, Crowell penned his second article dealing with the "bomb shelter thesis" – this time expanding his argument and leveraging newly found materials.

"Defending Against the Allied Bombing Campaign: Air Raid Shelters and Gas Protection in Germany" quickly found adherents and detractors from both the revisionist and exterminationist camps. While

Crowell never claimed to be the first to make the air-raid-shelter argument, he clearly developed it beyond what others had done.^[2] For revisionists who had argued for years that the gas chambers were all disinfection or delousing chambers, the “bomb-shelter thesis” seemed to take direct aim at their work. Likewise, a letter to Walter Reich, the Director of the USHMM explaining that the door displayed in the Washington DC museum was the replica of a common mass-produced air-raid-shelter door, went unanswered.^[3]

Beyond various short book reviews, editorials, and commentary that Crowell penned at the time under various pseudonyms, he set to work to complete his revisionist magnum opus, *The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes: An Attempt at a Literary Analysis of the Holocaust Gassing Claim*. Crowell’s book-length effort now went beyond the “bomb-shelter thesis” and examined the origin of the gas-chamber stories from the first reports through the disinfection procedures, the confessions of key witnesses and even the euthanasia campaign. Again, using his standard approach, Crowell sought to find logical explanations for the stories, which developed into what he termed “the Canonical Holocaust.” His approach was again a unique one. He applied the methodology of literary analysis and considered the sources and reports in a chronological and comparative method.

The title of Crowell’s definitive work was based on his discovery that the gassing narrative by “witness” Alexander Werth bore a stark similarity to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s description of a poisonous gassing in his Sherlock Holmes tale, “The Adventure of the Retired Colourman” of the 1920s. Crowell observed that there were causes for the gassing claims and did not accept the often-repeated explanations of the more extreme revisionists that the entire tale amounted to a lie, a hoax, or some sort of Jewish conspiracy. Rather Crowell would call the gassing claims “the delusion of the Twentieth Century.”

Bradley Smith published the first copies of *Sherlock* (as we referred to it) in an inexpensive Xerox-copied, plastic covered, spiral-bound edition. Smith began a public relations campaign called “Operation Sherlock” in which over a hundred copies of the book were sent to an elite of authors, intellectuals, and activists.^[4] Needless to say, there were few who would respond publicly, or honestly.

In 2000, Crowell would tackle the bomb-shelter thesis once again. Based on additional research, Crowell wrote his highly provocative “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau: A Reappraisal.” In “Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,” Crowell argued that the crematoria at Birkenau had been equipped with gas-tight fixtures as part of a civil-defense measure and that this is the most plausible argument for their existence.

As Lao Tzu commented, “The flame that burns twice as bright burns half as long,” Crowell’s bright revisionist career abruptly ended as the millennium began. If interesting events occurred or new discoveries were made, Crowell would continue to comment among friends, but his public writing had all but ceased. It was a great surprise when in 2011 publisher Chip Smith decided to publish a proper volume of *Sherlock* now titled, *The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes and Other Writings on the Holocaust, Revisionism, and Historical Understanding*.

The new 400-page edition by Nine-Banded Books included a new preface, and new chapters including “Revisiting the Bomb Shelter Thesis: A Postscript to ‘Bomb Shelters in Birkenau,’” and “The Holocaust in Retrospect: A Historical and Revisionist Assessment.” For a moment it seemed that Crowell was back. A prototype for a website was drawn up, but it was really not to be. The final words that Crowell would write on the subject were these:

“The destruction of the Jews in World War Two will remain an important object for study and commemoration among the Jewish people and the German people. The wars, revolutions, ethnic cleansings, famines, epidemics, and grand experiments in social engineering that dislocated many tens of millions of human beings, and killed a large proportion of them, and of which the Holocaust was a part, will be remembered by everyone who has a stake in the European inheritance. Like any series of events, it will be romanticized. Like any series of events, it will be mythologized. And, like any series of events, it will be properly understood only after the passage of time.”

Crowell was done with the Holocaust story. As such he turned his attention to other subjects. Foremost in his mind was another historical controversy—one that he claimed to wrestle with for 50 years — that of the authorship of the works of William Shakespeare. His final book was *William Fortyhands: Disintegration and Reinvention of the Shakespeare Canon* (2016). Crowell stated that his disintegration of the Shakespeare canon was the work that he was most proud of. Crowell inscribed the copy that he gave me, “The H. is over, so time for other things.” Indeed, for Crowell, he had said all that he could say on the Holocaust.

In early 2016, following news of the passing of his old friend, Bradley Smith, Crowell wrote what would be his last article – a memorial for Smith – “Bradley Smith: In Memoriam.” Here, once again, Crowell used the phrase “In Memoriam” just as he had dedicated his magnum opus many years prior. As used in *Sherlock* the Latin phrase seemed like a seal on the tomb of the Holocaust story itself, forever relegating it to memory. The meaning of these words shifted however when applied to Bradley Smith. The words had transformed into a requiem for a dear departed friend. It seems fitting that they be used once again to remember my friend Samuel Crowell. You will be missed.

Notes

- [1] Samuel Crowell, “Wartime Germany’s Anti-Gas Air-Raid Shelters: A Refutation of Pressac’s ‘Criminal Traces,’” *The Journal of Historical Review* Vol. 18, No. 4, July / August 1999, p.7.
- [2] Crowell credited Arthur Butz for example and his 1996 article, “Vergasungskeller.” Online: <https://codoh.com/library/document/1026/?lang=en>
- [3] Samuel Crowell, “Samuel Crowell’s Letter to the Director of the USHMM.” Online: <https://codoh.com/library/document/1147/?lang=en>
- [4] “CODOH Launches a New Revisionist Masterpiece: ‘The Gas Chamber of Sherlock Holmes.’” *Smith’s Report* No. 62, Feb / Mar 1999; <https://codoh.com/library/document/3805>.

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Title:	Samuel Crowell: In Memoriam!

Sources: *Inconvenient History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2017

Dates: published: 2017-05-01, first posted: 2017-05-01 12:32:15

<http://inconvenienthistory.com/9/2/4632>